

Lake Winnebago 2006 Drawdown Conference Call Notes

1. **Introduction.** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Detroit District held its annual drawdown conference call on 5 January 2006. The call began at approximately 9:30 a.m. CST with Mr. Phil Ross starting off with a round of self-introductions. A list of participants may be found at the end of this document.
2. **Presentation of the Agenda.** Mr. Ross then followed up with a brief introduction to the agenda and explained the purpose of the call was to discuss Lake Winnebago winter drawdown, both the timing and extent.
3. **Basin Conditions and Significant Events since the October Regulation Meeting.** Mr. Bob Stanick provided an update of basin conditions since the October regulation meeting. Some of the main highlights from Mr. Stanick's update are as follows:
 - a. Immediately following the October regulation meeting, a gate at the Menasha dam was opened to bring water levels down from 2.70 (ft) Oshkosh Datum (OD) to the regulation target of 2.50 (ft) OD.
 - b. A significant rain event occurred in early November dropping up to two inches of rain in some locations. Another ½ gate was opened at Menasha for a total of 1 and ½ gates open.
 - c. Gusting winds and rain continued for a few days making water levels difficult to gage, some gauging stations fluctuated eight to nine inches in a 12 hour time period. Another ½ gate at Menasha was opened for a total of two gates opened at Menasha.
 - d. By the first week in December the lake was approaching total ice cover. Ice thicknesses were approximately two to three inches.
 - e. By mid-December the Lower Fox River had significant ice cover. Lake Winnebago reached 2.50 (ft) OD on December 10th.
 - f. By December 27th, ice on the lower river was mostly gone due to temperatures reaching the upper 30s. Ice remained on the lake.
 - g. At the time of the Drawdown conference call water levels were at 2.38 (ft) OD and rising.
 - h. Mr. Stanick concluded this portion of the agenda by providing an update on staffing issues at the Fox River Sub Office in Kaukauna. He reported there are currently three people from the Kewaunee Area Office that are being trained to operate the dams on the Lower Fox River and assist in the monitoring program.
4. **Snow pack.** Mr. Dan Rudebeck from the Poygan Sportsmen's Club reported there was no snow cover in the upper river area as far north as Freemont. Mr. Art Techlow representing the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) mentioned snow is gone from all around the lake, but 7 to 12 inches of slushy ice remains on Lake Winnebago. Mr. Techlow also reported the ground seems thawed. Mr. Brian Hahn from the National Weather Service confirmed Mr.

Rudebeck and Mr. Techlow's observations and added that frost depths in December ranged from two to six inches; however frost depths are zero inches as of January 5th. Mr. Hahn also reported the weather will not change much in the week following January 5th. The Climate Prediction Center is predicting January temperatures to be above normal and precipitation to be near normal. The three month outlook suggests normal temperatures and precipitation over the January, February and March time frame.

5. **Drawdown.** Mr. Ross started the discussion on drawdown by suggesting that the proposed regulation target level of 1.68 (ft) OD by March 1st still be pursued as of this conference call. He also suggested that depending on how the snow pack develops over the next 30-days, drawdown target levels should be revisited to determine if drawdown targets should be raised if snow pack is minimal this winter. A number of participants agreed that it would be sensible to revisit the drawdown strategy in a month. Mr. Ross proposed that we take advantage of the current favorable weather and open two gates to increase flow to about 5,000 cfs. This should help stabilize rising water levels due to the current thaw and steer the lake toward drawdown targets. Mr. Ross inquired from some of the downstream users if there were any problems with this course of action. No problems were mentioned. Mr. Ross then asked Rob Elliott of the Fish and Wild Life Services if this would pose any problems for sturgeon or any other fish species. Mr. Elliott responded that flows are critical for sturgeon spawning from mid-April to mid-June and that there are no concerns during the drawdown period. Mr. Techlow also added that there are no concerns from a habitat perspective and he is in favor of adjusting drawdown targets based on the 2006 winter snow pack.
6. **Open Discussion.** A few property owners voiced concern over lower water levels come spring and early summer and asked if water levels have been kept lower in the spring over the last few years. Mr. Ross in conjunction with Mr. Techlow suggested that this past year's problems were drought related. Furthermore, despite the significant drought, the summer target level was met by early to mid-June. Mr. Ross also reiterated the USACE regulation strategy, stating that water levels are not being lowered in the spring. During the spring refill, water levels are managed to rise gradually. This strategy provides capacity for flood control during the spring thaw and promotes healthy wetlands, which helps improve water quality. Mr. Ross also suggested that problems with insufficient depths might be related to decreased dredging activities. Mr. Richard Harris inquired what a home owner can do about dredging sandbars. Mr. Techlow briefly touched on the DNR's dredge policy.
7. **Conference Call Adjourned.**

Participants: (Note: Some participants may have been missed during introductions.)

USACE: Phil Ross, Jim Bonetti, Bob Stanick, Dave Haefs, Joe Kalies, Keith Kompoltowicz, Tim Calappi

Other Agencies:

Bruce Gomm, – Kaukauna Utilities
Frank Krueger – Kimberly Clark/Neenah Paper
Carla Cramer – International Paper
Steve Brand - City of Oshkosh
Tom Conrad – City of Oshkosh, retired
Brian Hahn – National Weather Service
Representative – Calumet County Land and Water Management
Rob Way – Winnebago County
Rob Elliott – U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Citizens and Groups:

Skip Palermo – Appleton Yacht Club
Dan Rudebeck – Poygan Sportsmen Club
Rick Harris – property owner
Jackson Medly
Steve Kramer – property owner
Chad Casper - resident